

## CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 13 October, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

This has been a really busy couple of weeks for me, and I suspect the same is true for all of you as well. There were times when I had so much to do that I didn't know whether I was actually getting anything accomplished. More than once, I had to stop and center myself in prayer because nothing was making any sense:

O Eternal One!

It would be easier for me to pray  
if I were clear  
and of a single mind and a pure heart.

But I am who I am:

mixture of motives and excuses,  
blur of memories, quiver of hopes,  
knot of fear and tangle of confusion.

Come, find me, Lord.

Be with me exactly as I am.

Help me to find me.

Help me to accept who I am  
so I can begin to be Yours.

May God bring peace out of your confusion and busyness.

## THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

### RETREATS

If you'd like to make a Catholic Retreat, there are two opportunities coming up:

25-26-27 October:

Upperclass Retreat at St. Basil's Academy (across the River in Cold Spring);

a more "traditional" Retreat with Frs. Deponai and Wood, lots of Quiet Time for personal reflection, recreational time, topical talks and group prayer.

1-2-3 November:

UCF Retreat at Capuchin Youth Center (across the River in Garrison);

it'll be a "community building" weekend for the new United Catholic Fellowship, activities centered on building a sense of Catholic fellowship and identity among the members of this new Catholic cadet organization.

#### IS MARRIAGE IN YOUR FUTURE?

If you're planning a Catholic marriage in the near future, you'll need to have marriage instruction and preparation. Consider attending the next "Engaged Encounter (16-17 November).

Contact the Chaplain's Office for information.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

##### DISCIPLINA ARCANI ("The Discipline of the Secret"):

You've probably always thought that there wasn't anything terribly SECRET about Christianity and its teachings. If you wanted to be a Christian, all you had to do was to step up and say so...and be baptized.

But it wasn't always like that.

In the later days of the Early Church, Christian believers would not reveal the details of the Faith openly at all, even if someone wanted to become a convert. It was done slowly and gradually...and only with great care and secrecy. That's where the name "Disciplina Arcani" came from (it's Latin for "Discipline of the Secret").

The practice is found during the period of the Roman persecutions (AD 100s-300s), and the "discipline" was basically a reluctance on the part of Christians to speak openly to anyone about the details of the Faith.

Secret signs and pictures were used in public places, and anyone who wanted to become a Christian was only gradually given the full picture. Information about the most central of the mysteries (like the Holy Eucharist) was withheld until right before Baptism. It could take a year or longer to really be able to discover the whole picture of the Christian Faith.

Scholars believe that this was done to safeguard the mysteries from blasphemy or betrayal to the Roman authorities.

The practice had all but disappeared by the 600s, by which time Christianity was widespread in Europe and elsewhere.

Representing Christ by the image of a fish - a custom still preserved today - is probably the most well-known of these early secretive practices.

#### PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...a cadet who's battling depression.

...all cadets with medical concerns.

...anyone carrying a heavy burden.

...all our military brothers and sisters - and their families - throughout the world,  
especially those in areas of risk.

### GOT A QUESTION?

Q: What is the Church's position on Catholic soldiers who die in combat and have not received "Last Rites".

A: The term "Last Rites" is understood in different ways. It's an older term in the Church and isn't used much anymore. It can refer to the Sacrament that used to be called "Extreme Unction" and which is now called "Anointing of the Sick". It can also refer to "making Personal Confession and receiving Holy Communion" before embarking on a serious mission, such as going into battle.

Or it can refer to both.

Speaking in general terms, a soldier going into battle should think about making Personal Confession and receiving Holy Communion (the "Anointing" is reserved more for cases of serious illness, although it can certainly be administered to soldiers in this situation).

If that isn't possible, the soldier should spend some time in prayer, asking forgiveness for any sinfulness.

If someone dies in battle without being able to do any of the above, then we believe that God - Who is Mercy - understands the situation and deals with the soldier with love.

Q: I was explaining the Rosary to a "Christian non-denominational" friend of mine. and he asked how come Catholics worship Mary. I explained that we only ask Mary to pray for us. He disagreed with the whole idea of praying to a saint, like Christopher or Anthony, as I do in certain situations. What is the Church's official stance on praying to the saints, to Mary and to the dead (like deceased relatives)?

A: First of all, Catholics don't worship Mary or the saints or anyone but God.

You know this already, but I thought I'd say it up front anyway because, like you, I sometimes get weary of listening to non-Catholics telling me what I do or don't do... and what I believe or don't believe, as if I didn't already know.

I don't believe in worshipping anything or anybody other than God.

But I DO believe in what the Christian tradition has always called "The Communion of Saints" And this is what it means (I'm quoting a beautiful passage from a Church document):

So it is that the union of wayfarers  
with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ  
is in no way interrupted, but on the contrary,  
according to the constant faith of the Church,  
this union is reinforced by an exchange of spiritual  
goods.

The important part is "the exchange of spiritual goods".

What that means to me is that if I'm in difficulty, and I ask you to pray for me, and you do - then the Church believes that this prayer has an effect in the eyes of God. We can affect each other by the spiritual realities that we all participate in.

How often do we ask each other to pray for us?

Lots of times, I think.

So why should we treat those who have gone before us - "who sleep in the peace of Christ" - any differently?

That means that I have no difficulty establishing spiritual communion with the saints, with Mary and even with my relatives who have gone on before me. I believe that their prayer for me is as effective as asking anyone else to pray for me.

Maybe more so.

Same is true for the Catholic practice of having statues and crucifixes (which some non-Catholics object to).

If I keep pictures of my friends and relatives on my desk, why shouldn't I keep a reminder of Jesus or Mary or of a saint?

It all makes sense to me because we're all connected and mutually supportive in the "Communion of Saints".

So that's why I have little patience with people who claim that Catholics worship the saints or Mary, just because we ask for their prayers. We do the same thing with our friends, whenever we ask them to pray for us.

All we're doing is realizing the bond that unites us all - even beyond the grave.

## THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

(Note: over the next several weeks, this space will be devoted to a discussion of one of the Ten Commandments)

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT: "You shall not kill".

Exodus 20:13

Deuteronomy 5:17

Human life is sacred because from its beginning, it involves the creative action of God, and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end.

God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end; no one can - under any circumstance - claim for himself the right to directly destroy an innocent human being.

The Catholic understanding of the FIFTH COMMANDMENT includes three general areas:

- a) respect for human life;
- b) respect for the dignity of persons; and
- c) safeguarding peace.

In the category of "Respect for Human Life", the Church believes that the DELIBERATE murder of an innocent human being is gravely contrary to the dignity of the human being, to the Golden Rule and to the holiness of the Creator. The law that forbids such deliberate murder is universally valid: it obliges each and everyone, always and everywhere.

The following topics are a part of this:

- a) legitimate defense: the Church has always upheld the justice involved in legitimate self-defense; this is true for individuals, for the common good of the family and for the State as well. If self-defense should involve the death of the aggressor, the Church does not consider it to be MURDER because each person has the right to preserve one's own life. HOWEVER, in order to be legitimate, self-defense must involve a certain PROPORTIONALITY: the death of an aggressor cannot be the first and only option; it must be the last resort.
- b) intentional homicide: both DIRECT and INDIRECT intentional killing is forbidden by the Fifth Commandment. This would include DELIBERATELY exposing others to mortal danger for no good reason; it would also include refusing assistance to a person in danger.
- c) abortion: the Church believes that an embryo is a human being from the FIRST moment of conception and has all the rights of a full-grown human being. Therefore, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for and healed like any other human being. One who gets an abortion - and also one who aids in the process - commits serious evil.
- d) euthanasia: direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick or dying people; it is morally unacceptable.
- e) suicide: taking one's own life is DIRECTLY contrary to God's will, but the Church believes that grave psychological disturbances, anguish, grave fear, suffering or torture can DIMINISH the responsibility of someone who commits suicide.

Under the second category - "Respect for the Dignity of Persons" - Catholic tradition has always offered the following considerations:

- a) scandal: scandal is an attitude or behavior which leads others to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes a source of temptation to others, damaging their virtue and integrity. Scandal is a grave offense when another person is led into committing a grave offense, either by omission or commission.
- b) respect for health: we are expected to take reasonable care of our health and the health of others. Thus, the MISUSE of food or drink, tobacco or medicine - as well as the use of drugs - are considerations here, as are any practices which would endanger oneself or others.
- c) scientific research: legitimate research can contribute to healing the sick and to the advancement of public health, BUT it is NEVER morally acceptable to adopt practices which

are not morally legitimate. So, experimentation which does not conform to the DIGNITY of the human person or which exposes the human person to DISPROPORTIONATE or AVOIDABLE risks is not permitted.

- d) respect for bodily integrity: this would forbid kidnapping and hostage-taking, terrorism and torture. It would also forbid amputations, mutilations and sterilization performed on innocent persons EXCEPT when done for strictly therapeutic medical reasons.
- e) respect for the dead: this aspect of the Fifth Commandment commands us to give due attention to the dying and to attend to the burial of the dead. It also permits autopsies for legal inquests or scientific research. Further, it permits organ donation after death. And finally, the Church permits cremation after death, provided that it is not done as a denial of our belief in the resurrection of the dead.

Finally, the FIFTH COMMANDMENT obliges us to think about "Safeguarding Peace". This covers several areas:

- a) peace: this basically begins with the avoidance of ANGER and deliberate HATRED on the personal level and expands to include peace on every level of human life. The cultivation of peace should be the goal of every human being.
- b) avoidance of war: The Fifth Commandment obliges citizens and governments to work for the avoidance of war. At the same time, Catholic tradition has always upheld the right of citizens and governments to defend themselves. From this position has come the idea of JUST WAR (the idea that defensive war can be morally justified). Catholic history has listed strict conditions that must be met in order to call a conflict a "just war":
  - the damage inflicted initially by the aggressor must be lasting, grave and certain;
  - all other means of dealing with the threat are impractical or have been ineffective;
  - there must be serious prospects of success;
  - the use of arms must not produce evils greater than the evils to be eliminated.

Also, with the parameters of the Fifth Commandment are considerations that surround all the aspects of national defense, humane treatment of war victims, the

evils of genocide and indiscriminate destruction during war. Further, the whole issue of the "arms race" and the production and sale of arms is also a moral question within the meaning of the Fifth Commandment.

So as you can see, the simple words "You shall not kill" have a length and breadth that covers a tremendously broad area, and we Catholics believe that God's intent is to oblige us to understand how deep each of us needs to go to fully understand and appreciate the sacredness of human life at every level.

#### UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"Not one of you is a believer  
unless you desire for your brothers and sisters  
that which you desire for yourselves."

Islamic maxim  
(Source unknown)

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

Have a good weekend,  
and don't forget the mission:  
to become an image of Christ.  
You're always in my prayers.

Woodie